847 oyŏ′, fruit chopped up, and Cognauxia, Cucurbitacea
278 (mbŭmyĕ́i I), roots ground, both boiled together, strained, and after cooling, used as an enema; 5) Maesopsis tessmannii Engl. Rhamnaceae (nkắngă′ I), bark boiled, strained, and used cold as an enema. In this last case, its inclusion among abortives was probably determined by the fact that the wood of the tree is stronger in the upper part of the trunk, while below it is weaker.

When the confinement is near, the woman usually goes to her
844 parents if her native village is not too far away and if conditions permit her to do so. /275/ Otherwise, she stays at home as do all older women who have borne three or four children.

Before the confinement the woman stays quietly in the house from two to three days, more rarely four days. Cases are not infrequent, however, when the birth pangs take the woman by surprise during her work in the fields, and she has to bring the child into the world without help, although when this happens she will try to attract the attention of passers-by or women in the vicinity by screaming and shouting, and the latter will assist her and take her and the child into the village.

It is strictly prohibited for male relatives or strange men to witness the birth (osō̆n, "shame"; some even said nsŏ́m, "crime"). Even the woman's own husband is present (osō̆n applies to him also) only when there are no female helpers, on which occasion he must take their place. This is, however, a rare and exceptional case; ordinarily there are helpful and experienced women aplenty, who flock to the woman in childbed to encourage her and to assist at the birth by clasping her body from behind and thus supporting it.

Without medicine, of course, a birth cannot take place. The
[278] sap of Cephalonema polyandrum K. Sch., Cucurbitaceae (ejăžŭ́m), and Fleurya aestuans (L.) Gandich, Urticaceae (ngūkŭ́n IV), is allowed to trickle into the vagina. The sap is slippery, "smooth," and will thus effect a smooth birth.

The actual birth takes place without any kind of assistance if the child has what the Pangwe also regard as the normal head
845 position. In case of the feet-first position or other irregularities, the child is forcibly pulled out and is then -- so it was said -- always dead. Difficult births seem to be quite rare since my various

845 informants had never heard of such a thing. Similarly, it very rarely happens that women die immediately after delivery from the consequences (bleeding, a weak heart) -- death by puerperal [164] fever, on the other hand, is more frequent. In cases of such a death, the Pangwe speak of a kiɛ̄'ɛ̄, which is as much as to say that a strange woman brought about the death through sorcery.

Once the child (in the case of a normal birth) has passed out 844 of the birth canal, it is received by one of the women assisting and the umbilical cord (ngŏ'b IV, not to be confused with ngṓb IV, "caul, sheath") is squeezed off with a raffia splinter at a distance of from eight to ten centimeters from the little one's body. The rest of the umbilical cord drops off of its own accord after five to six days and is then casually thrown away; by then the navel (dŏb, plural mŏb) is healed. In other cases, the umbilical cord is cut off one centimeter from the belly, thereby causing an umbilical rupture (edŏdŏb = navel par excellence) which is regarded as particularly beautiful. Now the child is washed and placed on a layer of leaves on the bed next to the mother. /276/

The afterbirth (akŏ'nan) soon follows of its own accord. It is usually placed in a leaf bundle and hidden in the refuse pile or buried in a pit in the plantain grove behind the house. If this precautionary measure is not observed, the child will die or the mother will no longer be able to bear children.

Finally a medicine is made for the mother: the herb Ocimum [278] gratissimum L. (asŏ'b) is dipped in hot water and pressed on the genitals.

During the delivery, the husband waits in the meeting house. 851 Once the child is born, he is told the news by one of the women assisting. Formerly, shots were fired as an expression of joy, but now the custom is no longer practiced, especially in the north, for lack of powder.

On the very first day, the mother gives her breast to the child. 853 If no milk flows, it is assumed that the mother has had lovers who are still in her "belly" and exercise an impeding influence. Therefore, out with them! Argument is of no avail; one after another, all the lovers must be named before those present, in 000 other words, the women, if the milk is to flow. On the second

843 Throughout her pregnancy the woman continues to live with her husband's other wives.

There are many prohibitions:

First of all, there is the prohibition on sexual intercourse after the pregnancy is certain so that the child will not be born covered with sperms and have a cold all his life.

The future mother may not eat decayed things for fear that the child will be born covered with black spots or with sores.

If the pregnant woman looks into the hollow of a tree, the child will be born with crossed eyes; she must not strike the death blow to an animal, for the child will have convulsions like those of the animal in agony. She may not step over a grave, or the child will have gaps in its skull, its bones will not knit, and it will die. She may not eat bananas or the child will have its head covered with scabs, she may not eat land turtle, or the child will always stay thin; it will also be thin if its mother has gone near a chameleon during her pregnancy. Neither may she step over the mvun or her child will be born with a swollen abdomen and die, just as it will die with a swollen abdomen after birth if its mother has eaten an animal, killed the previous day, which has a swollen belly. [81]

The pregnant woman who goes up to a door may not speak from the threshhold but must open the door and speak from inside; if she does not do so, at the time of delivery the child will come out and then go back into the womb of the mother, causing her unbearable pain.

A woman knows whether she will bring a boy or a girl into the world, if she has noticed whether the nsüe a mon has gone right or left in her womb: it will be a boy if it goes to the right, or a girl if it goes to the left.

844 Confinement (ekurele mir, literally "wrinkling the eyes"). The confinement takes place in the hut where the woman lives; it takes place nowhere else except by accident, for example, if the child comes into the world sooner than expected, during work in the fields or in the forest.

A circle of dry banana leaves is arranged on the ground in the hut. The woman giving birth is seated on it, legs spread, and held from behind by an especially strong woman. In front of her stands another woman to whom is given the name of mbyale, who waits for the child

844 and helps with its birth. It sometimes happens that the child presents only its head and that the rest has difficulty in following. One of the women present goes to ask the husband if, during the pregnancy of his wife, he has nailed anything or fastened it with vines, as it could be this that is holding the child back. In this case the husband must unnail or detach something; similarly, if he has built a hut, he must remove some bark from the wall of any hut in order to facilitate the birth of the child.

845 824 If the delivery is especially difficult, a man leads a young boy to a wild mango tree (andok), takes him by the feet, and makes him scratch the bark of the tree with a machete, while holding him with his head down. As he scratches, the boy collects pieces of bark in a plate. These pieces, taken back to the village, are used to prepare an infusion which the patient drinks. In case this remedy fails another is made: an infusion of a chopped herb (eyele nzum) is poured into the mouth of the woman in labor by a child perched on the roof of the hut; just above the woman the child has pierced a hole, into which the infusion flows through a hollow banana stalk. When neither of these two medicines has worked, there is a last one which is used in an unusual way, but which, our informants say, is always crowned with success. The invalid eats a paste made of mashed pumpkin, an herb (manden makwe), and a small snail (nson akwe), cooked with salt in leaves. It is very rare, however, that recourse must be had to any of these three medicines. During the entire period of the confinement, at which only women are allowed to be present, the husband stays outside the door of the hut.

844 Immediately after the delivery, the woman called mbyale takes the child and [82] cuts the cord (dol) about 10 centimeters from the abdomen with a piece of bamboo shaped in the form of a knife. The portion removed (ngoe mon) is buried under a banana tree, whose fruit is reserved strictly for men. Then the spot where the delivery took place is cleared of the leaves and washed; at the same time the child is bathed in cold water and laid on a fresh banana leaf. It must spend one night before taking the breast for the first time, and until then nothing is given it to drink.

The placenta (kum) is removed and wrapped in banana leaves in a package which is hidden in the brush. The young mother must not

844 see it, and if she sees it she will have no more children. The mother is then washed with very hot water in which pimento has been steeped; after this her abdomen is bound with a belt of bark (ewag) which she keeps on for several days.

846 After the birth of her child, a young mother is known by the name of nzinze, which she keeps until she has the right to resume relations with her husband. She has a special bed in the hut, on which a [844] menstruating woman may neither sit nor lie so as not to give scabies to the mother and the newborn. The young mother rests for about three months, during which she does no work and bathes every day with water as hot as she can stand, the lumbar region especially being [750] bathed. Moreover, after every bath she is smeared with red paste (ba) to prevent scabies.

Recovery from childbirth is marked by a celebration (okula mon). The first time she goes out, the woman carries a package of ba, a piece of which she places on every tree stump she meets on her way, to mark her path. On her return she prepares a large quantity of food she has brought back. The husband invites the men of his tribe, and the wife invites the women of her husband's tribe. When the food is ready, it is taken to the men in the watchers' hut, where the child is also taken. The women eat in the hut.

846 827 757 To improve the quality of her milk, the young mother drinks progressively, if necessary, three medicines:

(1) An infusion of aseh roots.

(2) A milky-looking infusion of pieces of tubers of a plant with a thorny stem (ekon bökun).

(3) Latex from a rubber plant.

761 789 It may be that the child dies at birth. Three causes for this are recognized:

An evur has eaten the child. To prevent this from being repeated and so that the woman will in the future bring living children into the world, she resorts to the practitioner. He goes into the forest armed [83] with a machete and a basket. He gathers the bark of an ovan, and also brush and vines that grow under this tree. On his return to the village he divides his collection into two parts. One part, mixed with water, is put in a large rectangular container of banana leaves called etok, which has been filled with the blood of a domestic animal sacrificed for the welfare of the woman. She then immerses herself

843 As soon as pregnancy is recognized, the parents have to observe all sorts of bityi, prohibitions, the first of these being to stop having sexual intercourse, which would bring on a miscarriage or produce a monster. They must not go near a corpse nor attend funerals. The woman must abstain from certain foods /91/, the eating of which would harm the child: fish, which would cause skin diseases; bat and duck, which would mean webbed fingers and toes; snake, which would mean a child born without limbs or with atrophied limbs, etc. The woman must avoid taking long strides and stepping over holes or ditches and must stop wearing drawers if she has done so before. The husband must not nail or tie anything, which would make for a difficult delivery; he must also abstain from certain foods. During pregnancy the woman anoints the belly and breasts with palm oil mixed with baa, wears a special belt of ŏkumu liana (a kind of solanaceous plant), and avoids leaving the house barefooted.

"Accidental" miscarriages are generally attributed to the breaking of a taboo (nsem) and entail ritual purification; so long as these have not been carried out, the woman is not allowed to speak to any man except her husband, at least directly, nor to look a man in the face. "Criminal" miscarriages are attributed to sorcery or, more precisely, 783 to an évu, which may belong to the woman herself; they entail more rigorous purification; the lochia are submitted to a kind of magical "disinfecting" before being buried secretly beneath a road so that 847 passers-by will walk over them without knowing. Voluntary abortion, very rare in former times, is becoming fairly common, particularly among unmarried mothers in Christian families; it is brought about by vegetable emmenagogues (one is extracted from papaya root) or by introducing into the neck /of the womb/ a roll of twisted bark (I could not find out from what tree). Sometimes women induce abortion in one of their co-wives out of jealousy.

844 The first delivery and often succeeding ones usually take place in the woman's native village (jaŋ). A husband is not allowed to take wife and child back home until after payment of what is really the final installment of the bride price, particularly a substantial present for the mother-in-law, which is repeated at each birth, whence the proverb, "A mother-in-law's basket is never full." The parturient is delivered in a sitting position, with her mother or ntyi (mother-in-law or co-wife of higher rank) holding her from behind, and assisted by a midwife, mbialé binga, formerly an official in

844 one of the women's associations. The child is delivered on a mattress of banana leaves. The umbilical cord is cut with a special knife, perhaps the same used in circumcisions (1), and it is buried under a

1. This is not certain; since the circumciser is a man, we may question whether he would use a woman's knife.

banana tree, whose fruit will be étyi to people of the opposite sex from the child. The placenta is buried by the mother herself in a secret spot, or in her place by a woman of her own blood; afterward the mother may tell her child, as a mild way of cursing, "I know where your placenta is." The baby is immediately wrapped in a loincloth and laid beside its mother, after being shown to the father if it is a boy. The following day the baby as well as the mother is rubbed with warm oil, and it is given the breast. /92/

845 Difficult deliveries are quite common, and the midwives' technique extremely uneven. Although some may know how to effect artificial delivery, even version, most of them are limited to massaging and to using magic, like placing an axe between the mother's legs. If the woman dies in childbirth, sorcery is suspected or a grave nsem like incest; in the old days the baby, even if born alive, would have been buried with its mother. A stillborn child also arouses great suspicion about the mother, who may have to go through an ordeal and be forced to confess an offense presumed to have caused the death of the fetus.

Some writers have claimed that baby girls were sacrificed at birth 847 as being of no value to the clan. This seems very unlikely unless the infanticide was the result of an accusation of sorcery, which could also apply to a boy. What is true is that a woman giving birth only to girls would be considered the victim of a spell or a breaking of taboo.

The birth of twins is propitious, for they are thought to be necessarily mie or mmimie, that is, free of évu (the same word mie means "confinement" or, more precisely, the "labor" of childbirth). Twins receive traditional names that vary according to clan.

846 The first coming out of the house /relevailles, "churching"/, ékulu mon, "baby's coming out," takes place three months after birth, if everything has gone well. The woman starts bathing in the

881 304 779

one thereby becomes incorporated in him and in the tribe. Finally, the taboo surrounding this organ of the body, to which the origin of circumcision may be traced -- either because of the social function of the organ or of the danger of its premature use, or even because of its independence of volition -- allows circumcision to be considered as a desecration that has to precede the stage of virility, in order that use may be made of it. (2)

2. Bros, Religion des peuples non-civilisees [Religion of Non-civilized Peoples], "Circoncision" [Circumcision].

881 304 779 778 [844]

Some of these statements hold good for the Fan; some are less applicable. Let me use as an example one of the things that illustrates very well the close connection between circumcision as a religious rite and childbirth rituals, the fact that pieces of cloth used to staunch blood are in both cases carefully kept to be used for the same purpose. [520]

Ordinary warriors place them with their personal totem in the mfek or pineapple-fiber bag which never leaves them. These pieces of cloth, or fragments of them, are always part of totemic sacrifices. The sons of chiefs, on the contrary, are not allowed to keep them; they bury them deep at the base of the sacred fig tree planted when they were born over the remains of the umbilical cord. This custom certainly goes back to remote antiquity. Among the Egyptians, the fig tree was considered sacred and dedicated to the Egyptian Venus, Hathor. From this perhaps comes the word éthu, designating a garment made from the bast of the fig tree. The same word, éthu, has remained in the Fan language with the same meaning, "garment," and the inland Fan always make vegetable-fiber cloth from the fig tree, which they still dye red; this was formerly the color dedicated to Hathor, and it has remained the color of betrothal garments. For the same reason, before marriage, young men and women stain themselves red from head to foot. It is a color "set apart,"

[287 855]

1. Birth and Name Giving

844 Only women, the village matrons, are allowed to help a mother in childbirth. Men are absolutely excluded, even husbands. A woman who gives birth on a journey prefers to go off by herself into the forest rather than ask for her husband's help.

As soon as the child is delivered, his umbilical cord is cut and he is carefully washed. The remnants of the cord are wrapped in a cloth and buried out of the way. In the case of a chief's son, especially that of the head chief, the remains are buried, as we have seen, at the foot of a sacred fig tree. (1)

[824 778]

1. Ficus elastica.

Great importance is given to the tree's growth, and to touch it is strictly forbidden. Any violation of the tree would be considered an attack upon the human being.

[689]

851 A few days after birth, the baby is carried to his father, 847 who may accept it or refuse it. However, the latter [571] happens only if the child is deformed or crippled, in which case it is ruthlessly sacrificed. The religious rites (1) connected

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1. See Bulletin de la Société Neuchâteloise de Géographie [Bulletin of the Neuchâtel Geographical Society], 1910, "Les rites de la naissance chez les Fân" [Birth Rites among the Fang], by Father Trilles.

with birth are numerous, but the only ones that seem to me to be totemic are name giving and the choice of the baby's totem.

The name is solely the father's choice; it is often determined by attendant circumstances, atmospheric or other, or by some local happening, a hunt, a fishing expedition, the